

Town of Garrett Park Historic Preservation Committee

Report and Comments on Demolition Permit Request for 10920 Kenilworth

Pursuant to Section 401(c)(2) of the Garrett Park Code of Ordinances, the Historic Preservation Committee submits this statement regarding demolition of the structure at 10920 Kenilworth Avenue.

Demolition. The structure at 10920 is a “Gunnison House” – a mid-century form of pre-fabricated home that was intended to help meet expanded housing needs following the end of World War II. (See GPHPC report on “Gunnison Houses,” copy attached). The house at 10920 Kenilworth is one of only four Gunnison homes in Garrett Park. As such, and because the Gunnison Houses represent a noteworthy mid-century building technique, the demolition of 10920 Kenilworth is an unfortunate loss to the historic fabric of Town, which reflects the continuum of building styles in every decade from the 1880’s to the present. Although it is regrettable to lose this example of a Gunnison home we do not oppose the demolition, in large part because the structure has already suffered demolition by neglect (for a discussion of this phenomenon as applied to historic properties see

<http://forum.savingplaces.org/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=ccd565f7-27f1-fcd7-3a9-351b5a7b645b&forceDialog=0>). The decade-long abandonment of occupancy resulted in sub-minimal maintenance of both the property and the structure at 10920, resulting in deficiencies that likely render the house unsound.

Committee recommendation: The attached write-up on Gunnison houses notes that each had “a plaque with its individual ID number, a size number, and the date it left the factory.” The Committee recommends that the Town Council request the developer of 10920 to locate the plaque (typically in or near the furnace room), carefully remove it, and provide the plaque to the Town for addition to the Town Archives.

New construction. We have also reviewed the documents filed on the proposed new construction at 10920 Kenilworth. The plans make it abundantly clear that, owing largely to the addition of hundreds of square feet of impervious surface and inadequate provision for stormwater runoff, the new structure will have significant adverse impacts on properties in the path of major new stormwater flows. The proposed construction adds a long driveway where there was none before; a garage where there was none before; paved walkways; and several hundred additional square feet of roof on a significantly larger residence than now occupies the lot. It appears that the developer has requested a waiver from Montgomery County of 96% of the otherwise-required stormwater management resources for this lot. The consequence will be greatly increased amounts of stormwater runoff to other properties.

The direction of water flow off of the lot, as adjacent residents have witnessed and as reflected on the site plans for the new construction, is south-southwest. The adverse effects of the large volume of overland water flow is exacerbated by the fact that a WSSC stormwater drainage pipe,

which is buried beneath the lots at 10918 and 10920 Kenilworth (also shown on the site plans for 10920), has failed. "Downstream" from 10920 are several homes that are significant in terms of their contribution to the historic fabric of Garrett Park: an additional Gunnison House at 10918 and several "Chevy" houses on the west side of Kenilworth between Strathmore and the subject property. The Council should be cognizant of the stormwater problems that such large additions of impermeable surface at 10920 will cause.

Gunnison Homes in Garrett Park

The houses produced by Gunnison Homes, Inc. were described by the *New York Times* in its 1961 obituary of the founder, Foster Gunnison, as "the first commercially successful mass-produced home in the United States." Gunnison was a re-eminent lighting engineer and a pioneer in the U.S. in the use of structural glass. He designed lighting for the White House, the Empire State Building, and Rockefeller Center. In 1935, Gunnison started Gunnison Homes in New Albany, Indiana in an attempt to bring together modern structural technology and mass-production techniques to produce an inexpensive, easily-transportable, but sturdy prefabricated house. The company began production in 1936 and had produced 4,500 houses by the outbreak of World War II.

The basic Gunnison home model was built of 4 x 8-foot plywood panels and could be expanded in 4-foot increments. They could be built on a slab or a basement. The walls were made of marine quality ¼-inch plywood, insulation, and framing studs. All were joined together with an adhesive and put through a hot plate press. This "stressed skin" technique was adapted from a process used to make airplane wings. The resulting wall units were only two inches thick, but had reasonably good thermal characteristics and were touted for their strength. The house was bolted together for wind resistance. The plywood walls could be left plain or covered with other sheathing materials. Into these walls were inserted steel casement windows and wood doors. Kitchens and bathrooms featured steel cabinets. Extras like fireplaces, porches, and garages could be added. The houses could be assembled on a foundation from the manufactured components in about 4 days.

Gunnison Homes became especially popular after the war as industry strove to meet the huge demand for new homes. They could be quickly constructed, were sturdy, and affordable. U.S. Steel bought a controlling interest in the company in 1944. A *Time Magazine* article from Feb. 11, 1946 speculates on the promise of pre-fab houses as a solution to the post-war housing shortage. It describes Gunnison Homes as follows: "Gunnison Homes, Inc., a U.S. Steel subsidiary, expects to be the biggest U.S. producer of prefabricated houses. President Foster Gunnison plans to have his New Albany, Ind. plant (which made 4,500 houses before the war) in production by March. It will turn out a complete house every 25 minutes. A new \$1,200,000 factory will be in production by August. Retail prices: from \$3,500 to \$8,000 (including cost of erection, plumbing fixtures, electrical refrigerators)."

Gunnison Homes were marketed by franchise dealers, and by 1950, the company offered 11 models. U.S. Steel Houses were manufactured until 1974.

The local franchise for Gunnison Homes was the Walker Homes, Inc. of Wheaton MD. There were four Gunnison Homes built in Garrett Park. Two of them have so far been identified as "Walker" homes. Gunnison Homes can be found at 4800 Oxford Street, 10918 Kenilworth Avenue, 10920 Kenilworth Avenue, and 10938 Montrose Avenue.

Sources: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,854164,00.html#ixzz0gl7wFssJ>: Lowery, Patricia, "Prefab-ulous: Gunnison Homes were sturdy, affordable and went up in a wink." *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, March 10, 2007 (link at: www.post-gazette.com/pg/07069/767964-30.stm)

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Company Founded by Foster Gunnison, a pre-eminent lighting engineer and pioneer in the use of structural glass, in 1935 in New Albany, Indiana. U.S. Steel bought a controlling interest in 1944, and bought the entire company after Gunnison's retirement in 1953. The company then became U.S. Steel Homes, Inc..
In 1961, Mr. Gunnison's New York Times obituary called his product "the first commercially successful mass-produced home in the United States." His was the first successful attempt to apply mass-production techniques to housing.
Over 4000 Gunnison Homes had been sold before WWII.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/07069/767964-30.stm#ixzz0glDHud4r>

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Each house had a plaque with its individual ID number, a size number, and the date it left the factory.

There is also a good deal of information about Gunnison Homes on www.bobvilla.com .

An interesting Obituary of Gunnison can be found in the St. Petersburg *Independent* Friday, October 20, 1961 p. 6B. An obituary was also published in the New York Times.



Town of Garrett Park

Incorporated 1898

To: Mayor and Town Council
From: Gene Swearingen
Subject: Appointment of Archives Committee Members
Date: September 9, 2016

Mayor Benjamin recommends the appointment of four residents who have volunteered to become members of the Archives Committee. The appointments must be approved by the Council.

The Town Code Section 113, attached, describes the Archives Committee and its powers. Under paragraph (c) (3) the appointment of members is described and states that members "...shall be appointed for a term of five years, except that in making initial appointments, some appointments shall be for less than five years so that no more than two (2) terms shall have simultaneous expiration dates.

The volunteers and the initial terms they have volunteered for are:

Kacky Chantry - Two (2) year term

Bill Elwood - Three (3) year term

Jane Salomon - Two (2) year term

Lillian Del Priore - One (1) year term

Emails from each of the volunteers expressing their interest in serving are attached.

It is recommended that the Council approve these appointments.